

Public Health Fact Sheet

Rabies



What is rabies and how is it spread?

Rabies is a preventable viral disease that infects the nervous system of man, domestic and wild animals.

The rabies virus is transmitted through the saliva of a rabid animal to another animal or human by biting. The virus also can be transmitted when infected saliva is deposited on damaged or broken skin, or in the eye or mouth.

What animals are most affected?

Domestic: Cats, dogs and cattle.

Wild: Raccoons, skunks, bats, foxes and coyotes.

Small animals such as squirrels, rats, mice, hamsters, guinea pigs, gerbils, chipmunks, rabbits and hares are almost never found to be infected with rabies and have not been known to cause rabies among humans in the United States.

How can rabies be prevented?

- ◆ Vaccinate cats, dogs, ferrets, horses, cattle and sheep regularly.
- ◆ Do not handle stray or wild animals. Contact the [Macomb County Animal Shelter](#) if encountering such animals.
- ◆ Keep pets under supervision.

What is classified as an exposure?

- ◆ Being bitten by a potentially rabid animal.
- ◆ Saliva of an infected animal in the eyes, mouth or open wound.
- ◆ Finding a bat in a room with an unattended child or sleeping adult.

What to do if exposed?

Domestic animals: If a pet is bitten or has had contact with a potentially rabid animal, contact a veterinarian immediately for further advice.

People: Wash the wound immediately with soap and warm water for ten minutes. Immediately call a physician to discuss wound treatment, a tetanus booster may be needed. *A risk assessment must be completed by a public health official to determine the need for rabies vaccine.* [Contact the local animal control office](#) to capture the animal for examination, testing or observation.

If there are questions of exposure to rabies, contact the Macomb County Animal Shelter at 586-469-5115 or the Macomb County Communicable Disease Program at 586-783-8190. After 5:00 p.m. and on weekends call Michigan Department of Community Health at 517-335-9030. For additional rabies information, contact the [Macomb County Communicable Disease](#) Hotline at 586-469-5473.

If there is any possibility of exposure, do not release the animal!